

A voice for education and conservation in the natural world  
Rogue Valley Audubon Society  
[www.roguevalleyaudubon.org](http://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org)

*Deadline for the March 2023 issue is February 20*



**February IN PERSON Program**  
**Tuesday, Feb. 28, 2023 at 7:00 pm**  
**Sparrow ID with Chuck Gates**

We will explore the ins and outs of Oregon sparrow identification. By taking a detailed look at 15 different species, you should leave this program with the skills you need to take on this challenging bird group. Most of these species can be found, at least part of the year, in the Rogue Valley.



**About the Speaker**

Chuck is a retired school teacher, former Board Member of the Oregon Birding Association (formerly Oregon Field Ornithologists), founding Board Member of the East Cascades Audubon Society (now East Cascades Bird Conservancy), creator and editor of the online Oregon Birding Site Guide (under revision), creator of the Central Oregon Bird Database, creator of the website Central Oregon Bird Nests, Eggs, and Young, volunteer at the Crooked River Wetlands in Prineville, and leader of the Prineville Bird Club.



Lincoln's Sparrow  
Credit: Jim Livaudais

**Location:** Medford Congregational Church of Christ- Lidgate Hall, 1801 E. Jackson St., Medford  
**Time:** 7:00 pm (coffee/tea/cookies will be served beginning at 6:30 pm)

**Zoom option:** The Zoom link will be posted on the Rogue Valley Audubon webpage the day of the meeting.

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Medford, OR 97501

## Teamwork Makes the Dream Work!

One of my personal goals for this year was to connect with local organizations to promote birding and bird conservation. I am happy to report that we have two really great partnerships in the works.

The new Public Lands store in Medford reached out to RVAS and would like to partner with us on some in-store talks and possibly some local field trips. Also on our wish list is to start up a Young Birders Club. If you are interested in working with us and Public Lands, please let me know!

Jackson County Library Services has invited RVAS to present twelve programs during the spring at various library branches throughout the county. We will be providing talks on Backyard Birding/Birds of Jackson County to library users of all ages. What a great way to spread the message of stewardship for our feathered friends, and also introduce people to Rogue Valley Audubon! A few of the dates are covered, but we still need a few more speakers. If you are interested in getting the public excited about birding in their own backyards, please let me know and we'll try to work you into the schedule.

RVAS runs on volunteer power! Thank you to all who have volunteered so far, and thank you to those who are thinking about it and are ready to contact me! All of your work and dedication to RVAS is most appreciated.

Erin Ulrich

RVAS President

## Introducing our new Program Coordinator!

Hello! I'm Rebekah, the new Program Coordinator for Rogue Valley Audubon Society! I've lived in the Rogue Valley for a few years and am so happy to call it home. I'm looking forward to helping bring in a variety of talks for everyone to enjoy! If you have an idea for a future talk you would like to attend, please email me at rebekah.bergkoetter@gmail.com.

Chapter Program meetings are held on the fourth Tuesday of the month, September through April, at 7:00 pm. Meetings take place at 1801 E. Jackson St., Medford, in Lidgate Hall of the Medford Congregational Church of Christ.

**NOTE:** If deemed unsafe for gathering, chapter meetings will be held on Zoom.

## Status of upcoming events

Field trips: Denman Bird Walk is back! Mar. 1, Apr. 5, May 3

Project Feeder Watch: Feb. 18, Mar. 4 & 18

## February Field Notes 2023

By Frank Lospalluto

A New Year with new birds for birders' lists. eBird usage has exploded locally the last few years, and every user has access to what is being seen, where and when. Monthly field note articles have begun to seem quaint and dated. In this note we will move away from the lists and the listers and focus on one bird or absence thereof.

Lewis's Woodpecker have been all but absent from our region this winter. Only a couple of singles have been



Lewis's Woodpecker  
Credit: Jim Livaudais

spotted in January. A look at eBird does show birds in California, starting near Redding and then south. The answer may reside in the absence of an acorn crop this past year.

Weather conditions during pollination and fruit set resulted in acorn crop failure. The intense hail storms we had last spring may have been one cause. Though Lewis's Woodpeckers are well adapted for aerial insect capture, in the winter they rely heavily on acorn mast. Unlike Acorn Woodpeckers, they store acorn pieces - not whole fruits - in cracks and crevices of trees.

Nomadic winter behavior is not abnormal for Lewis's. It is a trait noted by many researchers over the years in multiple species accounts. It will be interesting to see how many of these birds we will observe when they start to make their way back north to breeding areas. And then what happens with our oaks this spring and summer.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

### References:

Shunk, S. A. (2016), Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America, Mariner Books

Vierling, K. T., V. A. Saab, and B. W. Tobalske (2020), Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes lewis*), version 1.0. In Birds of the World (A. F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA

## Jacksonville FeederWatch Update

Our names are Henley and Kloe and we are the lead Ornithologists for this month for Mr. Williams 3rd grade class at Jacksonville Elementary. This month has been a very exciting bird month for our class. We have lots of bird activity and we have seen several new birds. We have seen a new species called a European Starling and also saw a lot of Dark-eyed Juncos! The most exciting bird sighting this month was when we saw 32 goldfinches! We keep on getting a lot of deer but ever since we got those chilly-pepper suets the deer have not messed with the bird feeder. Thank you for giving us the chilly-pepper suet. We really enjoy being Ornithologists.

Sincerely,  
Kloe and Henley





## Ashland 2022 Christmas Bird Count Summary

By Cat Gould

The 2022 Ashland Christmas Bird Count was held December 18, with 56 participants braving the wintry chill from 17°F on up to 47°F. While viral caseloads in the valley prevented us from comfortably gathering at the end of the day, we did meet via zoom to go over our findings.



Tundra Swans on Emigrant Lake

Credit: Sally & George Peterson

The species and the individual bird numbers were up from last year. Our final count was 117 species, including 5 count week species (compared to 105 species in 2021, and 111 species in 2020), and 12,863 individual birds (compared to 8,159 birds in 2021, and 13,124 birds in 2020). The top three species seen were American Robins at 3,994, Dark-eyed Juncos at 904, and European Starlings at 561. The cold temperatures froze many local ponds, reducing the amount of expected waterbirds.

Area 1a team on the NE corner, led by Dick Ashford, was hopeful to see a Short-eared Owl recently reported by a landowner but it was not to be. However, a Sharp-shinned Hawk followed closely by a Cooper's Hawk escorting a ball of starlings was exciting viewing. Kristie Mergenthaler was grateful for the lack of snow and wind and enjoyed the sunny mix of meadowlarks and interesting rock formations in the valley.

Team 1b in the Pompadour area, led by John Bullock, enjoyed gorgeous weather and good bird numbers till noon when activity dropped significantly. While overall numbers were down, the appearance of a pair of Great Horned Owls at a very cool, dilapidated barn more than compensated. A possible leucistic Eurasian Collared Dove is still to be confirmed.

Area 2 in the Billings Ranch area, led by Shannon Rio, started the day with her favorite species- Barn Owls. John Alexander's highlight was seeing Shannon see the Barn Owls!

Participants of Area 3, led by Janet Kelly, were hopeful to see some waterfowl at Ashland Pond now that it has begun to fill. But the water was frozen, and most were found along Bear Creek east of the Greenway.

Area 4a, led by Sammie and Renee Allen, also found frozen ponds along with a Sora and some Rock Pigeons attempting to skate on the ice. But the big surprise was 16 Wilson's Snipes at the Dog Park.

Vince Zauskey led Area 4b in North Mountain Park, where he sighted 32 species including a White-throated Sparrow and a now infamous and much visited Red-naped Sapsucker.

Above Siskiyou Boulevard in Area 5, Brandon Breen along with our youngest birder Willow (on her second count at the age of 2!) had an exciting start watching a Common Raven chase a Rough-legged Hawk, and later on a Townsend's Solitaire.

Despite taking a long hard look in Lithia Park, Bob Quaccia did not see any American Dippers on count day and only one during count week; their numbers are down on the annual Dipper count also.

Area 6 participants, led by Kate Cleland-Sipfle, weren't able to spot the resident Pygmy Owl but it was included in the count week birds. Large groups of Steller's and Western Scrub Jays appeared to be upset about some kind of predator, but it could not be sighted.

Area 7 up the road between Hwy 66 and Hwy 140 (DIMR), led by Peter and Linda Kreisman, saw 60 species including Tundra Swans during count week, possibly a female Leucistic Mallard, and three very daring para-gliders enjoying the clear weather.

*Ashland CBC continued on page 5*

*Ashland CBC continued from page 4*



Canyon Wren  
Credit: Sally & George Peterson

In Area 8, Tundra Swans being spectacularly flushed by an American Bald Eagle were sighted on count day by George and Sally Peterson at Emigrant Lake. Other notable sightings include a Semipalmated Plover, Long-Billed Dowitcher, and a Canyon Wren.

Bob Hunter led Area 9 up Tyler Creek Rd. to Little Hyatt, where he sighted 39 Sooty Grouse!

A lone Golden Eagle was spotted overhead, and Bob was surprised to see 8 Mallards on the open water.

On the South West end of Area 10, Frank Lospalluto was lucky enough to report 69 species including a Northern Saw-Whet Owl and 2 Great Horned Owls, a Gray Jay, a White-headed Woodpecker, Evening Grosbeaks, and 35 Mountain Chickadees, a testament to the higher elevation of Area 10.

## Medford 2022 Christmas Bird Count Summary

By Bob Hunter

This year's Medford Christmas Bird Count was held on December 17. It was a beautiful and mostly sunny day. There were 44 participants that logged participation and effort at 113.9 party hours and 447.7 miles.

There were 121 species counted on count day, with 1 additional species (Swap Sparrow) seen during count week. There were 108,816 individual birds counted this year mainly due to an astounding 90,303 American Robins counted. Of these, Pepper Trail and Chris Uhtoff counted an estimated 70,000 robins flying over Kelly's Slough area at dawn. This was an all-time count high for robins. The previous high was 56,543 robins. If one takes robins out of the equation, the overall individual bird numbers were low. Not true for Savannah Sparrows, however, with a new high count of 262 individuals breaking the previous high of 252 individuals. Four Ferruginous Hawks tied the previous high. Two of these birds were seen by Vince Zauskey's team in Section J.

The most notable bird absent from the count this year was the Lewis's Woodpecker. As many as 300 Lewis's Woodpeckers have been seen in previous years, and they have been seen in 66 previous counts. Gulls and White-tailed Kites continue to be absent from recent counts.

Norm Barrett's team had a team high of 94 species for the count, including the count's only American Bittern and the count's only Tree Swallow. This was also the highest species number their team had reported in Section A before.

For the second year in a row, the only Ring-necked Pheasant was recorded by Ron Ketchum's team in the Eagle Point area. Jade Keehn started before dawn and was rewarded with the count's only Western Screech Owl. Her team also found an American White Pelican at Agate Lake, only the fourth time one has been seen in the Medford count. Amanda Alford's team, covering Area G, found the count's only Red-breasted Nuthatch, as well as an Orange-crowned Warbler. Other notable sightings were an Evening Grosbeak by Frank Lospalluto's team, a Green Heron by Rebekah Bergkoetter's team, two Eared Grebes by Lynn Kellogg's team, and two White-throated Sparrows.

Thanks to all the team leaders and participants for making this year's count a safe and successful one.

## Photos from the Field - January 2023

By Frank Lospalluto

A mid-January visit from a LAWRENCE'S GOLDFINCH at a local Medford residence brightened up the month. It brought a horde of birders from around the state to Lisa Milano's home. This was the thirteenth state record, but likely a number more have visited our area that were not reported. Generally southern Oregon is as far north as this goldfinch ventures, and they may become a resident in the future, not unlike California Towhee, Great-tailed Grackle, or Black Phoebe. Photos by Gary Shaffer and by Tanner Martin.



Credit: Tanner Martin



Credit: Gary Shaffer



A Red-naped Sapsucker found during the Ashland Christmas count was still being seen during January. Photo by Tanner Martin.



A number of Black-billed Magpies have been seen out east of Ashland and Phoenix. Photo by Karl Schneck.

*Field Photos continued on page 7*



*Field Photos continued from page 6*

A Red Fox Sparrow was found out near the Whetstone Pond parking lot by Tony Kurz of California, and re-found by local birders Janet Kelly and Tanner Martin. The Red Fox Sparrow is a subspecies of Fox Sparrow that breeds up north mostly in upper Canada, and is the regular Fox Sparrow found in many parts of the eastern US during the winter. Photo by Janet Kelly.



It's been a banner winter for American Robins!  
Photo by Nick Viani.

Finally, here is a photo of a Least Seedsnipe by renowned photographer and birder Jim Livaudais down in Patagonia earlier this month.



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## Bear Creek Community Bird Surveys

The Bear Creek Community Bird Surveys are continuing! If you are interested in helping count birds at any of several sites along the Greenway, please send an email to: [bearcreekbirdssurvey@gmail.com](mailto:bearcreekbirdssurvey@gmail.com)

For more information about the surveys, see the December 2020/January 2021 (page 4), February 2021 (page 8), and March 2021 (page 2) issues of *The Chat*.

## The Conservation Column

By Pepper Trail

This month's column focuses on a long-neglected but hugely important bird habitat in Oregon and the Great Basin: saline lakes. Lacking outflows, and too salty for fish, these lakes are perfect incubators for brine shrimp and brine flies, which in turn provide essential food for great concentrations of migrating birds, especially Eared Grebes, American Avocets, and Wilson's and Red-necked Phalaropes.

Eared Grebes show particularly extreme dependence on saline lakes as migratory stopover sites. Once reaching the Great Basin lakes following nesting in the northern Great Plains and Canada, they become completely flightless for months while building up large fat reserves by feeding on abundant brine shrimp and brine flies. Not only do they molt their wing feathers, but their flight muscles atrophy, while the organs involved in digestion and food storage greatly increase in size. This is then reversed when the birds are ready to move on: they increase heart size and reduce digestive organ mass to about one-quarter of its peak in preparation for the nonstop flight to their wintering grounds. This atrophy/hypertrophy cycle is repeated 3-6 times per year, and so the Eared Grebe has the longest flightless period of any flying bird in the world, in some cases totaling 9–10 months.



Sadly, all the West's saline lakes, including Utah's Great Salt Lake, Oregon's Lake Abert, and California's Mono Lake, are in trouble. A recent report has concluded that Great Salt Lake could go completely dry in five years (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/01/06/great-salt-lake-utah-drying-up/>). That would unleash catastrophic toxic dust clouds over Salt Lake City, as well as being a disaster for bird populations. Closer to home, Lake Abert in remote eastern Oregon north of Lakeview is also a critical stopover site for migrating grebes and shorebirds, and last summer it was almost completely dry.

Drier conditions under climate change will exacerbate effects of water diversions by decreasing flows to lakes and wetlands. Lower water levels increase lake salt content, altering the food web that resident and migrating shorebirds and waterbirds rely on. No other ecosystems in the arid West can meet these species' unique requirements. Since shorebirds and waterbirds congregate in large numbers at these sites, they are particularly vulnerable to habitat loss.

Maintaining healthy bird populations depends on proactively managing these habitats amid water demands across the region. Solving these water challenges will require collaboration, innovation, and flexibility in how we use, share, and manage water so that people, birds, and wildlife can thrive together.

Here is a summary of key findings from National Audubon's recent *Water and Birds in the Arid West* report:

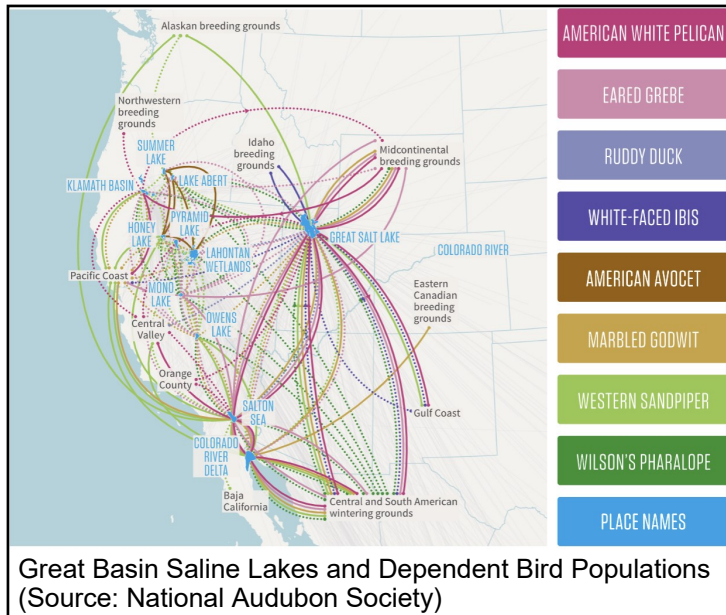
- Collectively, saline lakes in the West support global populations of birds, including over 99 percent of the North American population of Eared Grebes, up to 90 percent of Wilson's Phalaropes, and over 50 percent of American Avocets.
- Saline lakes are critically important to migratory shorebird species, whose populations have declined nearly 70 percent since 1973.
- Water levels in saline lakes have declined dramatically in the last 100+ years due to draining, diversions of inflows, and lake and groundwater extraction.
- Lower water levels have increased lake salinity, altering food webs and reducing invertebrate food sources for migrating and resident shorebirds and waterbirds.
- Drier conditions under climate change will exacerbate the impacts of water diversion on saline lakes by decreasing freshwater inflows.

*Conservation Column continued on page 9*



Conservation Column continued from page 8

Fortunately, these critical lakes are finally receiving much-needed attention from policy-makers. This December, the *Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Program Act* passed the House and Senate following a bipartisan effort led by Senators Jeff Merkley and Mitt Romney. This legislation will establish a scientific monitoring and assessment program to help save the Great Salt Lake and other saline lakes in the West, including Oregon's Lake Abert.



Here are statements on the legislation taken from a press release by National Audubon:

"Our lands and waters—including saline lakes in Oregon like Lake Abert and Goose Lake—are integral to the survival of countless animals and migratory birds," said Senator Merkley. "These ecosystems must be protected, but we can't do that without sufficient data. With the passage of this bipartisan bill, we are one step closer to securing the studies and science needed to put long-term plans into action to ensure our saline lakes ecosystems can thrive for generations to come."

"With the Great Salt Lake currently at the lowest levels ever recorded, we must do whatever is necessary to save it," said Senator Romney. "I was proud to lead this legislation with Senator Merkley and Congressman Moore, which will establish a scientific foundation and ongoing monitoring system to inform coordinated management and conservation actions for threatened Great Basin saline lake ecosystems and the communities who depend on them."

"Great Salt Lake and the network of saline lake ecosystems in the arid West face very serious challenges with increasingly low water levels, placing local communities and millions of migratory birds at risk," said Marcelle Shoop, Saline Lakes Program Director for the National Audubon Society. "The additional resources and technical expertise provided within this indispensable science-based program will build on current efforts locally to conserve these habitats, while advancing collaborative solutions across the Great Basin to protect people and birds."

The Saline Lake Ecosystems in the Great Basin States Program Act would provide the U.S. Geological Survey—in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and tribal, state, academic, and nonprofit organizations—resources to conduct scientific monitoring and assessments to establish effective management and conservation efforts to preserve essential Saline Lake habitats within the Great Basin network.

## Jon Deason retirement

By Carol Mockridge

Jon Deason retired in November from the Rogue Valley Audubon Board after serving faithfully for 8 years. He held many positions including vice president, secretary, and hospitality chair. He was responsible for the tasty refreshments and the bird-friendly shade grown coffee at chapter meetings. He also served on the first committee to save the Hedrick Middle School chimney, where his knowledge of the Medford community was appreciated. As the numbers of board members fluctuated downward, Jon worked tirelessly to recruit new board members to ensure the viability of RVAS. He said that he thinks now is the time to retire since the board is in great shape.

We thank Jon for his exemplary service. He will be missed!



Jon Deason with RVAS President Erin Ulrich at the 2022 Holiday Auction  
(Credit: Kay Simmons)

## BIRDCENTRIC EVENTS FROM AROUND THE REGION

### **RVAS**

#### **First Wednesday Bird Walks: March 1, April 5, May 3**

Join RVAS for our monthly outing to Denman Wildlife Area. Walks begin at 8:30 am and end before noon, and are led by Jim Hostick. The gate will be open from 8:00 - 8:20 am. Participants need to purchase an ODFW Area Parking Permit at the ODFW Office, Sportsman's Warehouse on Delta Waters and Highway 62 in Medford, or at Bi-Mart. We request that all participants be vaccinated for COVID-19.

Directions to meeting spot: We will meet at the entrance off Agate Rd. between 1/4 and 1/2 mile past the fire station on the left side of the road. Coming out Table Rock Rd., turn right on Antelope Rd. and go to the light on Agate Rd. and turn left. The fire station will be on your left at the corner of Ave. G and Agate Rd. Go 1/4 to 1/2 mile past the fire station and the gate will be on your left. Coming out on Highway 62 to Antelope Rd., turn left and go to the next light. Turn right and continue to the gate on Agate Rd.

### **Project Feeder Watch**

Come check out this citizen science project at North Mountain Park. To volunteer, contact Jennifer Aguayo at [jennifer.aguayo@ashland.or.us](mailto:jennifer.aguayo@ashland.or.us). For more info, visit [www.roguevalleyaudubon.org/project-feeder-watch/](http://www.roguevalleyaudubon.org/project-feeder-watch/).

DATES: Saturdays Feb. 18, Saturdays Mar. 4 & 18

TIME: 9:00 - 10:00 am

### **Wild Birds Unlimited**

#### **Ashland Pond Walks**

Erin Linton and Max McClarnon will be leading bird walks to Ashland Pond. An easy trail leads to and encircles the pond. The riparian habitat is good for migrants as well as resident waterfowl and songbird species. Space is limited to 9 participants. To reserve your spot, come in or call the store at (541) 772-2107.

DATES: Wednesday Feb. 15 (led by Erin Linton)

Saturday Feb. 25 (led by Max McClarnon)

TIME: 9:00 am

### **Educational Talk: "Nesting Season"**

Laura will be speaking about setting up your yard to be a "bird landlord" at the Wild Birds Unlimited store (961 Medford Center, Medford). She will talk about avian architecture, providing nest boxes, and bird behaviors to watch for throughout the nesting season, along with predator problems and solutions. Space is limited to 15 participants. To reserve your seat come in or call the store at (541) 772-2107.

DATE: Sunday Feb. 26

TIME: 1:00 - 2:00 pm

### **Portland Audubon**

#### **Spring Malheur Shorebird Survey at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge**

Join Portland Audubon and USFWS staff in supporting the regional effort to survey spring migrating shorebirds in the intermountain west. We'll survey the Silvies Floodplain, and the Double O, Malheur Lake, and waters of the Blitzen Valley for spring migrating shorebirds. This survey is part of a project organized by Point Blue Bird Observatory and National Audubon, with support from the USFWS. Survey sites are all in closed areas of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. These sites include Stinking Lake, Harney Lake, and Mud Lake. Surveys may also happen at adjacent playa and spring habitat on BLM land depending on capacity. Must have own binoculars and be able to identify Snowy Plovers and other shorebirds, including peeps.

This survey will present an opportunity for adventure! Camping will be available and camping gear will be available for participants to use during this event. There are some driving routes during this survey. All other routes require a minimum of 5 miles of hiking, with the possibility of 10 miles. Conditions in spring are unpredictable. Wet playas can be difficult to walk on/survey. There are no bathrooms available during this survey.

**Registration is required.** To register and for all important information, visit:

<https://audubonportland.org/get-involved/community-science/spring-malheur-shorebird-survey/>.

DATES: Wednesday Apr. 26 - Saturday Apr. 29

COST: Free

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Outgoing RVAS board member Jon Deason (R), along with Carol Mockridge and Sara Norton (L), designed and built two cornhole games for the 2019 Swift Night Out community event at Hedrick Middle School in Medford. The game is painted to look like a brick chimney, and the bean bags have Vaux's Swifts painted on them. (Credit: Carol Mockridge)

  
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# ROGUE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

## THE CHAT

Newsletter of the  
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Post Office Box 8597  
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